

Directions in the Professional Development of Teachers for Enhancing Socio-Emotional Growth and Social Life in the School Environment

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Abstract

Keywords:

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curricular integration, school
social life, professional training

The present article presents a constative study that focuses on the socio-emotional development and social life in the school environment of children and the directions of professional training for teachers to build them. The main method used in conducting the study was the questionnaire-based survey. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, distributed online via the Google Forms platform. The collected data was entered and processed using the statistical analysis software SPSS. Before analysis, data cleaning was performed to identify and eliminate incomplete responses or data entry errors. The population under investigation consisted of teachers employed in pre-university education, working in public educational institutions from both urban and rural areas. The sample was a non-probabilistic, convenience sample, including only those subjects who were available to participate in completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to a total of 325 subjects, of which only 173 responded. The purpose of the study was to identify the main components of socio-emotional development that, in the opinion of the teaching staff, influence the development of children's and students' social life in school. The conclusions of the study show that the field of socio-emotional development is of interest to teachers. They consider that empathy, social and relational skills and emotional self-regulation are the main components of socio-emotional development that most significantly influence the socio-emotional growth of children and students.

1. Introduction

In recent years, educational guidelines emphasize not only the cognitive development but also the socio-emotional development of children and students. The role of teachers is becoming central to this role, so they must receive specific training. Teachers model emotional behaviors through their relationship with students.

Initial and in-service teacher training should include social-emotional development components. Training programs that develop teachers' emotional competences improve the quality of relationships with students, classroom management skills and professional resilience.

Social-emotional skills are promoted by educational models such as SEL (Social and Emotional Learning).

Positive social-emotional climate in the classroom is associated with better academic and personal outcomes. Thus, studies show that empathy, communication and conflict management are essential in educational work.

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1. The place of socio-emotional development in formal education

Formal education is built on the national curriculum, which is designed to ensure the coherence and consistency of the education system. The role of the curriculum is to promote effective learning environments, the well-being of students and teachers, and direct educational efforts towards cognitive development which is closely linked to socio-emotional development.

The accelerated pace of change imposes new standards of organization, functioning and development of the educational system, so that the holistic development of students can only be achieved through curriculum integration. The models of curriculum integration found in the literature are interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinarity. Curriculum integration is a way in which educational systems prepare for the actual integration of individuals into society (Jeder, 2020).



2.2. Components of social-emotional development

The Romanian education system is centered on skills training. Competence is defined as a structured set of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The three dimensions of competence act simultaneously to ensure the holistic development of children and students. It is important to note that emotional, cognitive and physical skill sets play an important role in the manifestation of specific behaviors that contribute to competence development.

Regarding the categories of competences that the Romanian education system has adopted, these are key competences, general competences and specific competences. One of the key competences is personal, social and learning to learn competences. It involves self-reflection, managing time and information effectively, engaging constructively with others in some way, resilience and managing one's own learning and career. It is also about: coping with uncertainty and complexity, learning to learn, sustaining one's own physical and mental health, maintaining physical and mental health, empathizing and managing conflict in an inclusive and stimulating environment.

According to Șandru (2022), social-emotional development represents an interpretation of theories related to social intelligence, emotional intelligence and the skill development applied within educational settings.

Based on the theories of Salovey and Mayer (1989-1990) we can outline the components of social-emotional development:

- Emotional self-awareness;
- Emotional self-regulation;
- Intrinsic motivation;
- Empathy;
- Social and interpersonal skills;
- Interpersonal relationship management;
- Conflict resolution;
- Self-esteem;
- Adaptability and emotional flexibility;
- Self-discipline and self-control.

2.3. Social-emotional development in shaping social life in the school environment

In the study "Children's perspectives on friendships and socialization during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative approach" conducted at the University of Quebec at Montreal, Canada, the topic of friendships and socialization, and their characteristics, were examined. The authors of the study believe that friendship and any positive

relationship play a major role for the development of social competence. (Larivière-Bastien et al., 2022)

The group of friends assumes increasing importance in a child's life, with multiple functions, from influencing the development of self-concept to shaping attitudes and values and adaptation in society. Friendships are based mainly on mutual loyalty, support and common interests. It should not be ignored that there are also negative functions of friends, as they offer values that are not necessarily socially accepted.

Communication is a key, very important factor in establishing positive realities between individuals, therefore it is a component that shapes the social life of children and students in the school environment. Alongside communication, school social life is constructed by interpersonal relationships, social norms and values, social groups, social activities and social change.

3. Research methodology

The main research instrument used, the questionnaire, was administered to a total of 325 subjects, of which only 173 responded to the questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was constructed and distributed online through the Google Forms platform. The data collected was entered and processed using the statistical analysis software PSPP. Prior to analysis, data cleaning was performed to identify and eliminate incomplete responses or input errors. The teachers working in pre-university education expressed their opinions on issues related to the components of social-emotional development that influence the development of social life in the school environment of children and students, ways of curricular integration of social-emotional competences and reflections on the importance of this area for the healthy development of children and students.

4. Results

In the following we present the statistical analysis of the results of a survey on the socio-emotional development and school social life of children and students. The population under investigation consisted of pre-university teachers in public schools. The sample was of a non-probability, availability type, in which only subjects who were available to participate in completing a questionnaire were included.

Figure 1

Place of residence of educational establishments

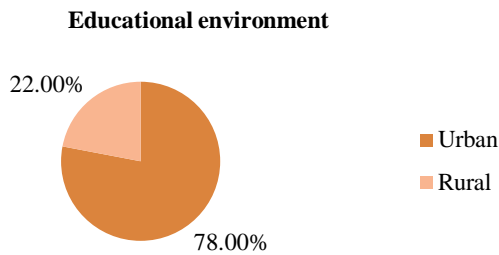
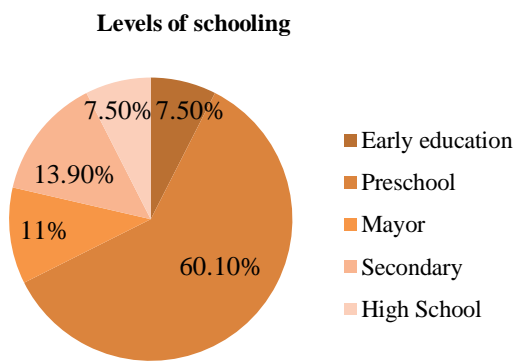


Figure 2

Levels of schooling in the educational establishments from which respondents come



The background of the research participants is both urban and rural, and the distribution of respondents by background of residence is shown in Figure 1. At the same time, the educational establishments where they teach cover the levels of schooling shown in the diagram in Figure 2.

The teachers' questionnaire sought their opinion on the inclusion in the curriculum for the level of education at which they teach and the subject they teach, of aspects related to the socio-emotional dimension. The following table (Table 1) shows the frequency distribution and modal value of this aspect.

Table 1

Frequency distribution of the assessment of the existence/non-existence of socio-emotional aspects in the curriculum

Social-emotional dimension in the curriculum					
		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Yes.	157	90.8%	90.8%	90.8%
	No.	16	9.2%	9.2%	100.0%
	Total	173	100.0%		

Table 2 shows the statistical indicators representative of the analysis (mean, mode and amplitude) of the frequencies of teachers' responses on aspects found in teaching practice, aimed at the social-emotional development of children and students.

Table 2

Statistical indicators representing aspects of socio-emotional development in teaching practice

		Are aspects related to the social-emotional dimension specified in the school curricula and/or syllabus for the level of education in which you work?	In your role as a teacher, do you support the social-emotional development of children/students in formal education?	In the educational establishment where you work, are there the material resources necessary to carry out specific educational activities in the field of social-emotional development?	Do you integrate specific aspects of social-emotional development into your daily activities?	Are you running a mono-disciplinary optional this school year or one that integrates aspects of social-emotional development?	Are you involved in any extracurricular activities this school year that integrate aspects related to the social-emotional development of children/students?
N	Valid	173	173	173	173	173	173
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		1.09	1.00	1.24	1.05	1.71	1.37
Mode		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	No.	Yes.

Table 3*Frequency distributions of socio-emotional development components*

Components of social-emotional development		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage	
Emotional self-awareness	Valid	Yes.	72	41.6%	41.6%	41.6%
		No.	101	58.4%	58.4%	100.0%
		Total	173	100.0%		
Emotional self-regulation	Valid	Yes.	83	48.0%	48.0%	48.0%
		No.	90	52.0%	52.0%	100.0%
		Total	173	100.0%		
Intrinsic motivation	Valid	Yes.	37	21.4%	21.4%	21.4%
		No.	76	43.9%	43.9%	100.0%
		Total	173	100.0%		
Empathy	Valid	Yes.	97	56.1%	56.1%	56.1%
		No.	76	43.9%	43.9%	100.0%
		Total	173	100.0%		
Social and interpersonal skills	Valid	Yes.	91	52.6%	52.6%	52.6%
		No.	82	47.4%	47.4%	100.0%
		Total	173	100.0%		
Interpersonal relationship management	Valid	Yes.	25	14.5%	14.5%	14.5%
		No.	148	85.5%	85.5%	100.0%
		Total	173	100.0%		
Conflict resolution	Valid	Yes.	52	30.1%	30.1%	30.1%
		No.	121	69.9%	69.9%	100.0%
		Total	173	100.0%		
Self-esteem	Valid	Yes.	79	45.7%	45.7%	45.7%
		No.	94	54.3%	54.3%	100.0%
		Total	173	100.0%		
Adaptability and emotional flexibility	Valid	Yes.	59	34.1%	34.1%	34.1%
		No.	114	65.9%	65.9%	100.0%
		Total	173	100.0%		
Self-discipline and self-control	Valid	Yes.	39	22.5%	22.5%	22.5%
		No.	134	77.5%	77.5%	100.0%
		Total	173	100.0%		

It is education that shapes people and develops them in a certain sense, providing a trajectory for each person. Social individuals are becoming more and more concerned about social change, trying to adapt by becoming more actively involved in social life. Social life is based on the social-emotional development of the individual, which starts at the earliest possible age. This idea is reinforced by the respondents to the questionnaire, 99.4% of whom

believe that social-emotional development influences the development of social life in the school environment for children and students.

Teachers help to improve the social interaction of children and students. Table 4 shows the statistical association between teachers' contribution to the social life of children and students and their intention to consider the integration of specific aspects of social-

emotional development in their daily activities in the group/classroom. The Adjusted Residual values in the table indicate that there are no significant statistical relationships between the categories of the two variables. It can be observed that the teachers' intention to integrate specific aspects of social-emotional development in the daily activities of the group/classroom can be seen, considering at the same time that they largely consider that these aspects have the role of contributing to the construction of the social school life of children and students.

Table 4

The statistical association between teachers' contribution to the social life of children and students and their intention to integrate specific aspects of social-emotional development into the daily activities of the group/classroom

To what extent do you consider that you contribute to building social life in the school environment for children/students? * As a result of your participation in filling in this questionnaire, will you consider integrating specific aspects of social-emotional development into the daily activities of the group/ class?

Crosstabulation

		Following your participation in filling in this questionnaire, will you consider integrating specific aspects of social-emotional development into your daily activities in the group/classroom?		Total	
		Yes.	No.		
To what extent do you consider that you contribute to building social life in the school environment for children/students?	To a very large extent.	Count	67	0	67
		Row %	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		Column %	39.2%	.0%	39.0%
		Total % of	39.0%	.0%	39.0%
	Adjusted Residual	.80	-.80		
	To a great extent.	Count	100	1	101
		Row %	99.0%	1.0%	100.0%
		Column %	58.5%	100.0%	58.7%
		Total % of	58.2%	.6%	58.7%
	Adjusted Residual	-.84	.84		
	To a small extent.	Count	4	0	4
		Row %	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Column %		2.3%	.0%	2.3%	
Total % of		2.3%	.0%	2.3%	
Adjusted Residual	.15	-.15			
Total	Count	171	1	172	
	Row %	99.4%	.6%	100.0%	
	Column %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	Total % of	99.4%	.6%	100.0%	

In Table 5 the Chi-Square Tests indicator of the association of the two mentioned variables does not indicate that any relationship between the influence of teachers' contribution to the construction of social life in the school environment and the integration of

social-emotional development aspects in daily activities can be affirmed.

Table 5

*Chi-Square Tests of the association of variables - Teachers' contribution to the social life of children and students * Teachers' intention to consider the integration of specific aspects of social-emotional development in the daily activities of the group/ class*

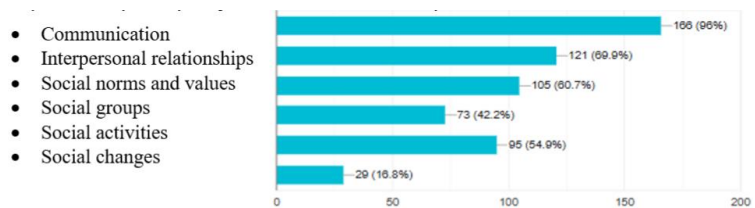
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	.71	2	.702
Likelihood Ratio	1.07	2	.586
Linear-by-Linear Association	.48	1	.488
N of Valid Cases	172		

One can observe the high frequency obtained by communication, this is not by chance, because communication is the basis of social organization. The components of social life in the school environment are interwoven and formed throughout the schooling period.

Figure 3

Frequency distribution of social life components in the school environment of children/students



5. Discussions

Teacher training becomes essential to meet the need for socio-emotional development. The educational curriculum must integrate strategies to support the development of these social-emotional competences in both students and teachers. These are fundamental to creating a healthy educational environment and supporting the harmonious development of students. In order to be effective in this endeavor, teachers need to possess strong emotional competences. It is also important for teachers to be aware of the impact of their own emotional reactions on students.

According to the Ministry of Education, teachers' competences are organized into seven areas:

1. Getting to know your students and how they learn.
2. Curriculum and teaching process.
3. Learning environment and well-being.

4. Counseling students, working with family/guardians and the community.
5. Ethics, reflexivity and lifelong learning.
6. Institutional development.
7. Digital technology in education.

These areas reflect the core values of the education system, such as collaboration, diversity, excellence, equity, inclusion, integrity, professionalism, respect and accountability.

In the area of "Curriculum and teaching process", teachers should aim at the following:

- Using relevant theories and research from the fields of psychology, pedagogy and didactics.
- Elaboration of long and short teaching projects, linking competences, contents, teaching strategies and technologies to the needs of the students.
- Clear formulation of the objectives and aims of the educational process for each activity, linked to the curricular provisions.
- Selection and sequencing of curricular content and learning strategies according to the individual knowledge and particularities of the students.
- Including the interdisciplinary perspective in teaching design.

Teachers' skills in curriculum design and development are fundamental to quality education. Through in-service training and adaptation to the needs of students, teachers can make a significant contribution to the development of students' competences.

Currently, there are several teacher training programs and courses focused on curriculum design with an emphasis on social-emotional development (SEL - Social and Emotional Learning), including:

1. CRED Project – Relevant Curriculum, Open Education for All

This national project, implemented by the Ministry of Education, provides in-service training for pre-university teachers. Available programs include:

- CRED Level II Training – Curriculum Empowerment: Focuses on competency-centered curriculum design, integration of digital technologies, and tailoring activities to the needs of students.
- "Digital educational resources: realization, use, evaluation": Develops competences in the use of

technologies for the creation of open educational resources.

- "Managing the effective implementation of the National Curriculum – CRED Manager": focuses on curriculum management and its effective implementation at school and classroom level.

2. Social-emotional education program "Emotional Explorers" – MENTO

The educational program has been designed together with Teach for Romania and is intended for teachers and professors. Among the educational resources the program provides structured activity guides for implementing social-emotional education in schools.

3. Program "Ways of developing socio-emotional intelligence" – Home of the teaching staff (Casa Corpului Didactic Dâmbovița)

This training program, endorsed by the Ministry of Education, is addressed to pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers. The duration of the course is 26 hours, conducted in a blended-learning system, and aims to develop teachers' social-emotional competences to support students in managing emotions and interpersonal relationships.

4. In-service training courses – "Education is Power" Association

This association offers courses accredited by the Ministry of Education, including:

- "Developing Emotional Intelligence for Teaching": an accredited in-service training program aimed at developing teachers' emotional competences, contributing to the creation of a positive educational environment.
- "Developing Social Emotional Skills (DSA): A complementary course offering tools and techniques to support students' social-emotional development.

6. Conclusions

The field of social-emotional development is of interest to teachers. The trend of teachers' involvement in the socio-emotional development of children and students is statistically visible. Supporting the social-emotional development of children and students in formal education, integrating social-emotional aspects into daily activities and being involved in extracurricular activities this school year are positive aspects of the educational process and promote the healthy, harmonious and holistic development of the

direct beneficiaries of formal education. Curriculum integration is a way of introducing specific aspects of social-emotional development into everyday teaching practice. Emotional self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, empathy, social and interpersonal skills, interpersonal relationship management, conflict resolution, self-esteem, emotional adaptability and flexibility, self-discipline and self-control are components of social-emotional development. Of these, empathy, social and relational skills and emotional self-regulation, in the opinion of teachers, have the greatest influence on the social-emotional development of children and students.

Teachers have the power to influence the development of children's and students' school life by ensuring a psychosocial climate favorable to personality development. The components of social life in the school environment are interwoven and shaped throughout life.

The participation of teachers in the research has contributed to the realization of personal reflections that are aimed at integrating specific aspects of social-emotional development in the daily activities of the group or class.

Well-trained teachers contribute to the healthy emotional development of children and students. Investment in teacher training is essential for holistic and inclusive education.

It is important to know that social-emotional education is an essential component of the educational process.

Authors note:

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